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DECORATION & FURNITURE

THE DECORATION OF OUR HOMES.



I. We are now about to consider practically the decoration of our homes, it is desirable, at the very outset, that we understand the term "ornamenting" to mean beautifying, and not merely the application of form and color to walls and ceilings. This remark may seem somewhat ridiculous, but it is necessary that I should make it, for I see much so-called decoration that is quite devoid of pleasant effect. Many a wall looks better when its surface is mere plaster than when the painter has practised

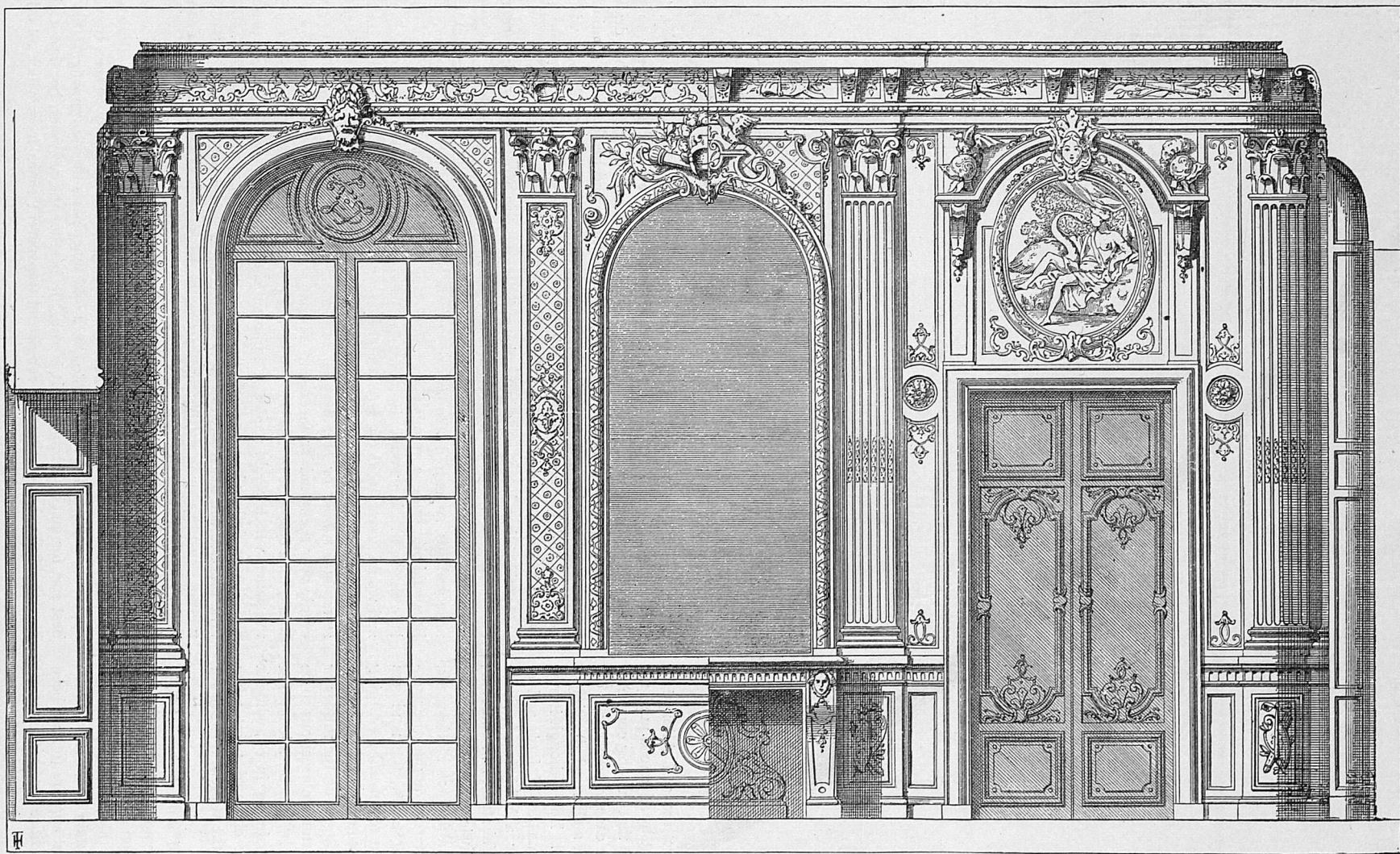
The production of repose should be our great aim, for all that disturbs the eye or attracts undue attention to itself is unworthy the name of art. In the case of a room, repose results from the harmony of all the colors employed in the decorations, in the furniture, in the hangings, in the carpets, in the ornaments, and in whatever objects are enclosed by the walls; but we must now speak only of decorations.

The production of repose being of the first importance, we have to confine decoration to its proper office as a background to the furniture and occupants of a room. The decorations of an apartment should at best form but a pleasant background for what is seen against them—namely, pictures, furniture and so on. Wall decorations must never usurp a primary place; they should be secondary, negative, and, to an extent, neutral in character. No one who has not tried a change of background

most landscapes is green, hence rooms that command a green view should be warm in color; reds, maroons, or citrons being especially suitable to such. If the colors of our rooms increase the beauty of the landscape, the latter in its turn will lend beauty to the room.

As to the class of pattern which we ought to place upon a wall, or the manner in which walls should be decorated, little can be said, for so many suitable methods can be adopted that no one or two can be singled out as the most correct. We may say, however, that strongly figured patterns are never desirable on walls. Even the walls of the Alhambra Palace at Granada, which are covered both with sculptured ornament and with intense colors, do not call to themselves undue attention, for the ornaments are small and rich in detail, while the colors occur in minute masses which are much intermixed.

Large patterns are, as a rule, more difficult to use



WALL DECORATIONS OF THE LOUIS QUATORZE EPOCH.

his craft upon it; for in the one case there is no evidence of ignorance, in the other there is.

In the decoration of rooms color-harmony plays an important part in producing desirable results. Simple colors, if harmoniously combined, always look well, while no combination of tints can be satisfying if discordant. The finest harmonies are those of subtle character. A common-place or simple harmony is not so pleasant as that which is more uncommon and mingled; and the finest color effects are achieved when the decorated surface consists of colors so intermixed that the aspect is bloomy, like a bed of many-colored flowers when seen from a distance. This color bloom is best attained by the employment of the colors blue, green, red and yellow, together with white, gold and black, in minute quantities; for the constant repetition of these colors over a surface in small masses gives the desired effect, viewed from a distance, more perfectly than any other combination.

from that which is wrong to that which is right can understand the improvement that may be effected in the aspect of any article in the room by an alteration of the character of surface on which it is viewed. If the wall is light in tint, with a pattern in strong colors upon it, nothing can look well when seen against it. Let this be changed for a paper of neutral colors and with pattern in soft tints, and everything will look more or less well when seen against it; yet that only will look as well as it can which is in perfect harmony with the walls.

By neutrality we do not mean muddiness of effect. Neutral colors may be glowing, or even radiant; but judgment is necessary in order that the right degree of neutrality be selected, according to the circumstances.

The wall of a room should form a suitable background to all that the room contains, and it should also make the landscape seen from the room more beautiful than if the room were undecorated. The prevailing tint of

judiciously in ordinary houses than small, and all patterns with strong contrasts of light and dark are undesirable; but the smaller the pattern is, the stronger its contrasts may be, while large patterns must always be softly colored.

Small and large are but relative terms; a pattern which is small for one room is large for another; and when I speak of large and small patterns I mean those which would look large or small in any particular position. A wall-paper with a pattern only two or three inches in height and even less in width may be sufficiently large for a small sitting-room, while a pattern repeating but once in two feet might be none too large for use in a public hall.

The size of pattern that may be used in any particular case must be left to the judgment of the person arranging the decorations, and must depend to a great extent, as we have just seen, on the softness or "strength" of

the pattern; but it must also depend upon other circumstances, as whether pictures are to be hung upon the walls, whether the draperies of the room are figured, and the like. If the hangings are figured the pattern on the wall must be very soft; but if the hangings are plain, or have only figured borders, then the pattern on the wall may be more pronounced unless pictures are to be hung upon it when, whatever be the nature of the hangings, the walls must be very unobtrusive in character.

Speaking broadly, dark rooms should be decorated with light colors, while rooms with an abundance of light should be colored with darker tints. Almost everything looks better on a dark than on a light background. Furniture does, the ornaments of our rooms do; so do our pictures, and so do we ourselves. But a light wall becomes of darker hue when imperfectly lighted, while a wall of medium depth of color becomes lighter by abundant light.

If the room is tolerably well lighted, but is yet not very light, a high, dark dado may be used, with a light wall and ceiling above, for the dado will give the requisite dark background to the furniture and occupants of the room, while the pale-tinted wall above and the pale-tinted ceiling will secure to the room the necessary light. In this case, however, it is desirable that there be one or more broad, dark lines in the cornice, or, in the absence of a cornice, a dark or effective frieze; for if the dark does not recur in some part of the room the dado will look too separate from the upper part.

When a high dado is used it is often desirable that it be plain, while the wall above is figured, for then the furniture, the pictures, and the occupants of the room are all seen against a plain surface, while the desire for ornament is satisfied by the figured wall above. If the dado is figured at all, its pattern should be of the softest kind, and then the upper part of the wall would be best plain. When the cornice is broad a frieze is rarely desirable, save in very large rooms, yet if the room is exceptionally high, a frieze may be advantageously employed. In some cases

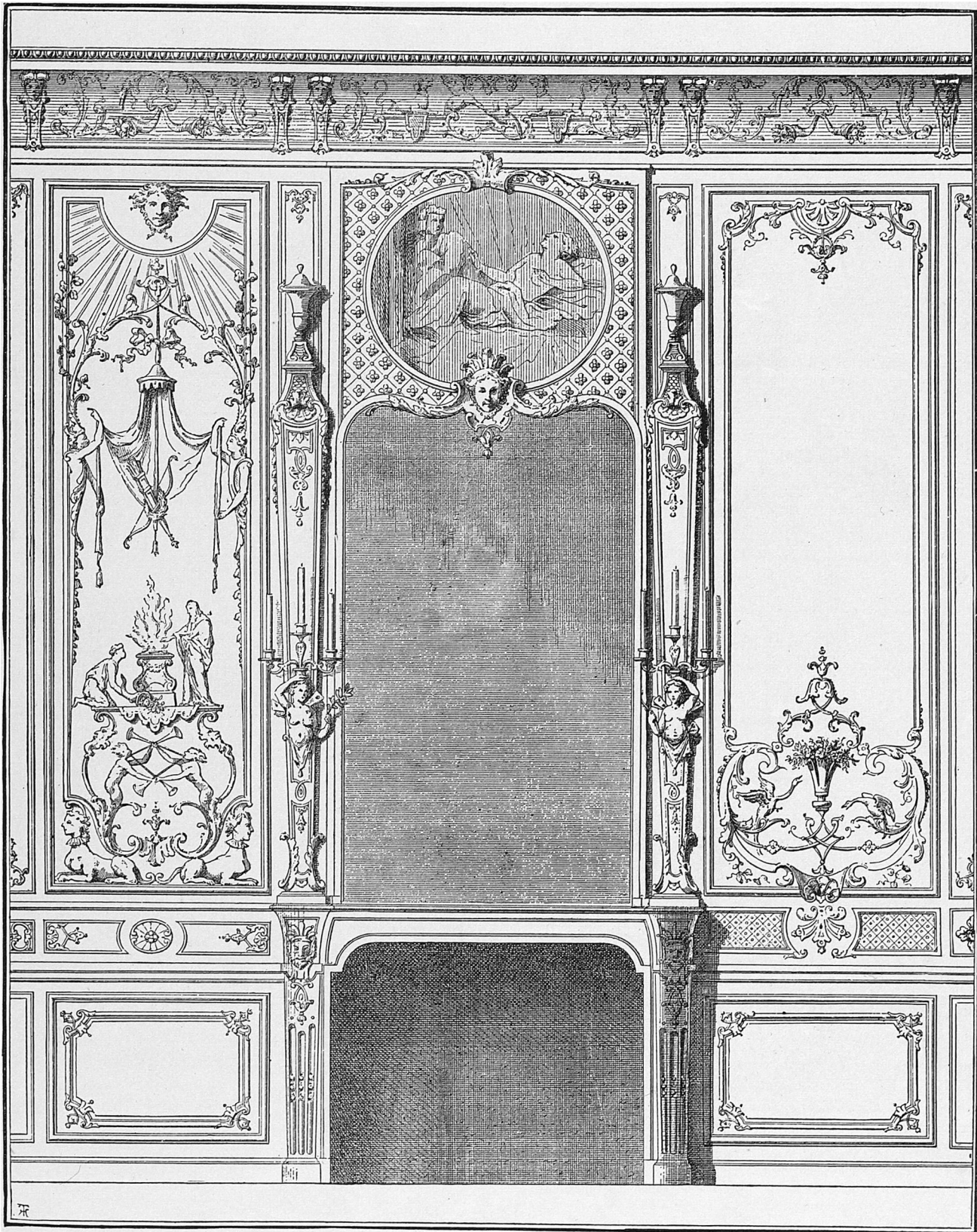
well-constructed cornices lend importance to rooms, but in ordinary town houses I think we are as well without them. If the ceiling color comes down an inch upon the wall and a well-designed frieze surrounds the wall, just touching this color and separating it from the wall tint, a most pleasant effect can be produced, and one which can be renewed at but small cost.

The frieze must vary in width with the height of the room, but no law can be laid down for height of dado and width of frieze. The rules of proportion, stated in a previous article, should always be observed, but, beyond this, personal taste must be left to determine the

Yet the amateur decorator will do well to dispense with strong geometrical figures on the wall and use them only in soft colors on the dado. Besides the manner in which a wall is to be treated in respect to height of dado and other parts, the tone and hue of its colors must have most special attention. Blue recedes from the eye, and thus, when applied to the walls, makes the room look larger than it actually is, but this is more especially the case with cold blues (blues with a green hue), while red and orange are advancing colors, and would thus, if placed upon the walls, make a room look smaller than it is. Green is always a particularly soothing color.

In a town house, if a room looked out upon red brick walls, I would give to it a decidedly green hue, or if the sun blazed upon it during most of the day, perhaps a tint of the coolest of blues; while, if the room commanded a lovely landscape, or lawn and shrubs, I would make it red or orange, according as it looked to a cold or a warm quarter of the heavens, the orange being used on the cooler room.

When it is proposed to make the walls of a room red, orange, blue or green, it is not intended that these colors be represented by the pigments vermilion, orange chrome, ultramarine or emerald green, but by soft and mellow tints of a red, orange, blue or green hue; yet I have seen beautiful decorations in which intense colors have covered large, flat surfaces. No rigid rules



WALL DECORATIONS OF THE LOUIS QUATORZE EPOCH.

heights of the various parts of the wall when divided into dado, central space and frieze.

When a dado is figured there is no objection to its pattern pointing upward, neither is there any objection to the pattern of the wall being of a similar character, but the wall may appropriately be covered by any intermingled or entwined pattern that gives the necessary repose, as well as by one of a bilateral character. Patterns on the plan of a rosette, or such geometrical figures as the circle, square and hexagon, also look well on a dado, but they are rarely satisfactory on a wall, while such elongated forms as the lozenge and oval may readily become so.

can be laid down such as shall govern all decorative work, and when a decorator begins to manifest real genius he becomes rather a law-maker than a servant of law. My remarks are intended to help those who have never studied art to have beautiful and interesting homes, and must not be understood as attempting to set forth laws which should govern all art.

In giving any particular tone of color to a room it is not necessary that a simple color be used, nor is it even desirable that such should be employed, for this is a common-place way of getting an effect. Orange results from the admixture of red and yellow; but if an orange

wall were required, the necessary hue might be produced by coloring the wall yellow and drawing a fine pattern in red on the yellow ground, for the eye will mix the two colors together when they occur in small masses; and if the wall is to have a citrine color it may be painted yellow and have a pattern drawn in blue and red with the proportions, in the finished surface, of six of yellow, eight of blue, and five of red; or the same citrine color could be got by tracing a fine green pattern on an orange ground, for green consists of eight parts of blue and three parts of yellow, and orange of five parts of red and three of yellow.

By the intermingling of small parts of color, rich, glowing, yet neutral effects can be produced, and these are often greatly preferable to the less interesting plain tint. If one room opens upon another, especially if the two apartments are only separated by a curtain which may be drawn aside at any time, and thus permit each room to be seen from the other, it is absolutely necessary that the general tones of the two should harmonize. In this case one may have a green tone and the other a red hue, for green and red harmonize the one with the other; or one may be orange and the other blue, for these colors combine to form a perfect harmony. If three rooms may at any time be connected together, the colors of each must harmonize with the other colors; thus, one might be olive, one citrine, and one russet in general effect, for these colors harmonize

when seen together, while each is pleasant when seen alone. The russet may be formed by using red in the proportion of ten, blue in the proportion of eight, and yellow in the proportion of three, or by combining purple in the proportion of thirteen with orange in the proportion of eight. Olive may be made by intermixing blue in the proportion of sixteen with red in the proportion of five, and yellow in the proportion of three, or by using eleven parts of green with thirteen parts of purple. We need not, then, in order to produce a citrine, an olive or a russet wall use simply these colors, for we can produce the same general effect of color by painting

small and closely arranged ornaments with positive colors, provided we employ them in certain proportions and of proper intensity. CHRISTOPHER DRESSER.

A REMARKABLE CABINET.

It is a great pity that no authentic record has been kept in the Meade family of the valuable works of art which General Meade gathered in Europe while United States Minister to Spain. It is only when something from that now widely dispersed collection comes by chance

Now we hear of another valuable art object, formerly owned by the Meade family, being in the market, of quite another kind, but hardly less valuable in its way. We refer to the noble cabinet of carved ebony veneered on oak, illustrated on the first page of the magazine. It was bought for a trifle at a sale of personal effects not long ago in Philadelphia by a furniture dealer of that city. He found it shockingly dilapidated, it having for many years been put to the most ignoble uses, and finally banished to the lumber room as valueless. Recognized, despite the bad treatment it had suffered, as a marvellous work of Italian art of the latter part of the sixteenth century, it was

sent to the Pennsylvania Museum for exhibition in Memorial Hall, where it attracted much attention. Soon a claim for its recovery was put in by the Meade family. The dealer refused to give it up; a law-suit for its possession was begun, and a compromise finally left it in his hands. In the mean while a member of the firm of Herter Brothers had seen it, and recognizing the possibility of its complete restoration, bought it, and converted it into the admirable piece of cabinetwork we see. In taking it to pieces the date 1561 was found behind one of the columns. The name of the maker is not known, but among the treasures of the Palace of Versailles is an armoire so similar in construction and decoration that there can be little doubt that it is by the same hand.

Renaissance cabinets of this order, selected from the most famous in European museum col-

lections, have been illustrated in previous numbers of The Art Amateur; but we recall no example more graceful in line or with better disposed ornament than this one. The object is of a character well known to students of old furniture. It was doubtless designed originally to stand in a church beside the altar, as a receptacle for the sacred vessels and utensils when not in use. As usual, it is in two parts, the table being five feet and a half long and three and a half high, and the upper part being the same length and three feet high. Our illustration shows the shut cabinet; when the doors are open, drawers on each side are disclosed, and in the centre a salon represented



"THE FORTUNE-TELLER." DESIGN FOR TAPESTRY DECORATION. BY F. BOUCHER.

(FOR DIRECTIONS FOR TAPESTRY-PAINTING, SEE THE ART AMATEUR FOR FEBRUARY, 1882.)

into the market that we can form any idea of the excellent judgment that characterized his purchases. In our issue of January, 1884, it will be remembered that we published an illustration of a valuable old painting of "The Coronation of the Virgin," which General Meade, more than half a century ago, presented to the Convent of the Visitation at Georgetown, in the District of Columbia, in appreciation of the services of the Sisters in the education of his daughter. The convent needed funds, and offered the picture for sale. Murillo was supposed to be the painter, but, as we showed at the time, it is more than probable that the master was Vandyck.